

THE FRENCH ALLIANCE

ADDRESS DELIVERED BEFORE THE RHODE ISLAND
STATE SOCIETY OF THE CINCINNATI, AT THE
STATE HOUSE AT NEWPORT, RHODE
ISLAND, ON JULY 4, 1904

BY
CHARLES HOWLAND RUSSELL

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THE FRENCH ALLIANCE

WHEN we meet each year upon the Fourth of July, we should realize that we celebrate not only the anniversary of the Declaration of Independence but also the far more important fact of that independence itself. Had not that independence been achieved, the Declaration long ago would have been forgotten, or, at best, be a mere episode of very little historical importance.

In celebrating, therefore, this independence which was achieved, our thoughts naturally turn to the forces and influences which enabled it to be achieved. Among such influences there were several, themselves the result of great underlying causes, apparent in the long retrospect of the previous history of Europe, which played important parts in the final series of events which culminated in our independence. Not alone, as it now seems, could Washington and the other statesmen and patriots and the brave and long-suffering armies of the colonies have won the victory. Many circumstances combined to aid them; and important among these were the relations which existed between France and Spain and between each of those powers and England at the time of the American Revolution. As

has been well said, even the stars in their courses seemed to fight for American independence. And one of the greatest of the influences which at the end enabled that independence to be won was the alliance which was made between the thirteen colonies, or, as they called themselves, the thirteen United States, and the King of France in February, 1778.

At the time of the Declaration of Independence, a state of war had already existed for over a year between the colonies and the mother country. The war had practically killed all commerce. The trade of the colonies had been chiefly with England and the West Indies, and as a result of the war that trade and the coasting trade and the fisheries were almost at an end. There was a market for American products in France, but the British cruisers controlled the seas. Almost everything, except food, which was needed for the prosecution of the war—clothing for the troops, arms and military supplies of every kind, as well as adequate financial assistance—could be procured only from Europe. Early in the struggle the American leaders realized that it was likely to be long as well as severe; and their thoughts turned toward France as a possible friend. They knew that she was still smarting under the disastrous peace of 1763, at the end of the Seven Years' War, which had stripped her of her important possessions upon the continent of North America and had injured her in other respects; and they believed that she might now see her opportunity to recover much that she had lost, through the commercial advantages which they were prepared to

offer her and through the injury which would result to England in the event of American success.

Early in 1776 Silas Deane was sent to France, as agent of the States, to seek assistance. Later Franklin and Lee joined him there, the three having been appointed envoys to the French court; and all eyes in America were turned longingly to France, with the hope that the aid which was absolutely necessary for the continuance of the struggle would come from her.

Let us consider what this France was to which America looked for help. It was still France of the old régime. The power of the king was practically absolute. The old feudal nobility had become hangers-on at court, seekers after honors and favors. In theory the king was still the State, as had been Louis XIV, but the influences about the throne were too aggressive and too strong to be overcome by any other than a wise and determined king, and such Louis XVI was not. There was no such thing in France as what to-day we call public opinion; but there existed a force, which we now know was stronger than any one then imagined it to be, and which was leading France to revolution. This was the day of the salons and of the "philosophers" and the "encyclopædists." There were some serious philosophers among them, who saw that changes were needed in the organization of society and government; and we have learned from experience that the doctrines of the philosophers and dreamers of one generation often become the rallying-cries of political parties in another.

The Frenchmen and Frenchwomen of the day, of

rank or intellect or ability, were many of them unwilling to be simply idle people of pleasure; and they gathered in the salons and gossiped philosophy. Clever sayings and verses, essays and disquisitions, were the order of the day. The France of that time has been called "a despotism tempered by epigrams." About the edges of the salons hung ambitious lawyers and others, who, if they were interesting or entertaining, gained an entrance and a hearing. The writers of pamphlets were in vogue and made much of. At that time, particularly, there was a great deal of talk and writing about the regeneration of the world and about ideal states of society and a millennium to come. The most popular subjects of the day were liberty and the rights of man. Little did all these people realize that the irresponsible talk, the pamphlets, the essays and the disquisitions were laying the train of the explosion which was to come.

Even at the court it was the fashion to talk of liberty and the rights of man; and, when the thirteen colonies went to war and sought to separate from England, it seemed to the philosophers and the salons that the new era at last had begun; that across the Atlantic the ideal democratic state was born; that there was a race with the antique virtues, determined to be free; that there was liberty fighting for its existence. The sympathy with liberty and the rights of man now had something definite and concrete to which to attach itself; and so the philosophers and the salons, and with them the general world of Paris, believing that success by the Americans would of necessity hurt England, took up the American cause, and the cry was that France must help the struggling patriots.

The young nobles and the soldiers of fortune, of whom there were many in France, were anxious to serve in America; and Deane was quite overwhelmed with requests for commissions, and gave so many that for a time there was danger that the American army would be swamped with these volunteers, and Washington found some of those who came more of an annoyance than a benefit. But great names in the war stand out from among them—Lafayette, De Kalb, Pulaski, and Steuben.

Franklin already was well known in Europe among men of learning, and, now an old man, was hailed as a philosopher and a sage. His arrival in France was welcomed as that of “the great man who had snatched the lightning from the gods of Olympus and torn the sceptre from the hands of tyrants, the gods of the earth.” That such language was permitted and went unrestrained shows that great changes had come since the days of the Grand Monarque. “Sire,” said the Marshal de Richelieu, who had seen three reigns, addressing Louis XVI, “under Louis XIV no one dared utter a word; under Louis XV people whispered; under your Majesty they talk aloud.”¹

The prime minister, Maurepas, was opposed to helping the American cause, and so was the great finance minister, Turgot, who realized that the giving of aid to the Americans would lead France into war with England. The state of the finances did not justify it; even should France be successful the expenses of such a war would be enormous; and there was no existing cause of offence or dispute with England. Events proved that his advice was

¹ Taine: *Ancien Régime*.

sound. The king's own judgment and scruples were opposed to it, and it is believed that his brother-in-law, the emperor Joseph II, advised him against it. Probably the greatest influence of all upon the side of the Americans was the arguments of the adventurer Beaumarchais, who convinced first Vergennes, the able minister for foreign affairs, and afterward the king that by aiding the Americans England would be injured and France benefited.

The queen took up the American cause. Lafayette, many years afterward, said that she really did not sympathize with it, but that, like a true woman of the world, she followed the fashion of the day. Thomas Paine, in his "Rights of Man," more gallantly says: "It is both justice and gratitude to say that it was the Queen of France who gave the cause of America a fashion at the French Court."

And so—no doubt somewhat to the surprise and bewilderment, though to the satisfaction, of our envoys—the cause of America became the fashion. Turgot had retired from the ministry; and the influence of Vergennes in foreign affairs was paramount. The arguments of Beaumarchais, convincing first Vergennes and then overcoming the scruples of the king; the opportunity to injure England and thus, as was believed, to restore the power of France; the fad of the day, of liberty and the rights of man, prevailing in the salons and among the philosophers and ready writers; the desire of the young nobles and the soldiers of fortune to seek adventure and win glory by their swords in the cause of the young republic against the old enemy—all these together

finally brought the king to consent to the giving of aid to the colonies.

But such aid could be given only in an underhand way. The government could not appear and thereby be compromised. But Vergennes and the clever Beaumarchais got up a commercial house, and the government sold to this house at low prices and on long credit its own arms and munitions of war and other supplies. This house shipped the goods to America; and Congress sent to it in return cargoes of rice, fish, indigo, and tobacco, many of which, being captured, never arrived. One million of francs were secretly paid by Vergennes to Beaumarchais in 1776 for the assistance of the colonies, and later in the same year an additional one million of francs were sent by Spain to Vergennes, through the latter's influence, for the same purpose. In 1777 Beaumarchais received a second million of francs from the French government; and money of his own and of other individuals also was put into these ventures. During the years 1776 and 1777 vessels loaded with clothing for the troops, powder, muskets, cannon, and other necessary supplies thus were sent to America. Most of them, with their precious cargoes, arrived in safety; and but for their arrival military operations, except upon a very small scale, could not have been continued by the Americans. The military supplies received from France made possible the defeat of Burgoyne, of which we shall hear later. American privateers had a refuge in French harbors. The king, as a free gift, sent another million of francs to Deane, with no doubt between them as to where the money was to go.

On the 28th of December, 1776, the three American envoys were informally received by Vergennes. They had been instructed to endeavor to procure a treaty of alliance with France; but the French government was not yet ready for war and could not make any promises, but nevertheless it was willing secretly to help them, and they were given two millions of francs more, but were told not to say from where they came. The king's free gifts, before the treaty of alliance was made in 1778, thus amounted to three millions of francs. Help was continuously being given in the ways already mentioned, and was of the greatest possible benefit; but some of the ships with supplies were captured, as were also some of the ships which were bringing cargoes sent by Congress to pay its debts in France. It was realized in America that so long as England had control of the sea she had an enormous advantage, and for this reason, among others, the envoys were instructed to ask the French government to make a treaty of alliance and to aid the Americans with troops and ships of war. The envoys were listened to with kindness and courtesy; but as yet there were no signs of any readiness upon the part of France to make such a treaty as they desired. France was watching the progress of events in England and in America and biding her time; and she and Spain were preparing for war.

So things drifted along. At the end of the autumn of 1777, it was the general opinion in Europe that the war was practically at an end and that the American cause was lost. To the discouraged Americans even the great victory which had been won over Burgoyne at Saratoga in October seemed,

at the end of the year, to have had no permanent results of value. But it did have great results, of which they were soon to learn, in its effect upon opinion in Europe.

It is true that the British forces in America had effected very little, but they were there, with all Great Britain and its power back of them. It was known in Europe that the British government intended to send out large additional military forces. The war seemed to be at a standstill. There were quarrels and dissensions among the Americans. Congress had little authority or power, and no one was disposed to lend it money. The troops at Valley Forge were almost in a state of famine. At one time half of them were unfit for duty through lack of clothing; and, when they marched, their way was marked upon the snow by the blood from their naked feet. It was believed in America that no further help could be had from France. Holland was rendering some aid through her merchants, but she did not wish to break with England; and the efforts of the American agents sent to procure assistance from other powers had been unsuccessful. There were great difficulties and long delays in communication; and often for many months no letters were received by Congress from its agents. The British cruisers swarmed about the coasts of Europe and America; and there was no more privateering by American ships from France, for the British squadrons effectively watched the French ports and prevented their going out.

Toward the end of the year, the envoys asked the French government to help them by buying a frig-

ate which was being built for them in Holland, but which probably could not safely leave there when finished, and by a loan of money. The king agreed to buy the frigate and to lend them three millions of francs, and also promised always to provide them with funds to pay the interest on their debt.

The news of the defeat of Burgoyne at Saratoga was not received in France until early in the month of December, 1777. The intelligence of that victory, and of the surrender of a British army under an able commander, was the turning-point in European opinion. It came like a thunder-bolt upon the government of England; and it convinced the government of France that the time had now arrived openly to aid the American cause. A few days after the news was received, Vergennes informed the American envoys that they might now renew their proposition for an alliance; and on the sixth of February, 1778, there were signed at Paris two treaties, one of amity and commerce and the other of alliance.

We do not need the records of history to enable us to understand with what rejoicing the news of these treaties was received in America. The future which had seemed so dark now seemed bright and full of encouragement. There is no episode in the whole progress of the war more touching than that of the ragged troops at Valley Forge, paraded to receive the announcement of the conclusion of the treaties, shouting with joy and gratitude: "Long live the King of France!" Washington, in his general order to the troops, said that it had "pleased the Almighty Ruler of the universe propitiously to defend the cause of the United American States, and by

finally raising up a powerful friend among the nations of the earth to establish our Liberty and Independence upon a lasting foundation."

Let us consider what all this meant. It was more than the assurance of military and naval assistance. These treaties were a recognition by a great sovereign power of the actual existence of the United States as an independent sovereignty. The Declaration of Independence had recited that the united colonies "are absolved from all allegiance to the British crown . . . and that as free and independent states they have full power to levy war, conclude peace, contract alliances . . . and do all other acts and things which independent states may of right do." But the declaration of their independence did not make the colonies independent; their independence was merely asserted, not established, and had never been recognized by any power outside of the colonies. All Europe, whether friendly or otherwise, had regarded the colonists simply as insurgents. It must be remembered also that there were grave doubts among many of the Americans themselves as to whether the declaration was wise or justified. Some of the most patriotic men in the colonies, some of the most sincere believers in independence, opposed the declaration upon the ground of its being premature, and contended that, as a result of the declaration, the war, instead of being one to obtain redress or of mere resistance to oppression and injustice, was open rebellion. But now how changed the situation! Think of the effect upon American hearts of these words from the treaty of amity and commerce made between the thirteen struggling col-

onies, which called themselves States, and the great King of France: "There shall be a firm, inviolable and universal peace and a true and sincere friendship between the Most Christian King, his heirs and successors, and the United States of America"; and of these words from the treaty of alliance: "If war should break out between France and Great Britain during the continuance of the present war between the United States and England, His Majesty and the said United States shall make it a common cause and aid each other mutually with their good offices, their counsels, and their forces, according to the exigence of conjunctures, as becomes good and faithful allies. . . . The essential and direct end of the present defensive alliance is to maintain effectual the liberty, sovereignty and independence absolute and unlimited of the said United States, as well in matters of government as of commerce. . . . Neither of the two parties shall conclude either truce or peace with Great Britain without the formal consent of the other first obtained; and they mutually engage not to lay down their arms until the independence of the United States shall have been formally or tacitly assured by the treaty or treaties that shall terminate the war."

The treaty was not formally announced, nor were the American envoys presented to the king, until March. The British ambassador thereupon left Paris. In the preceding month, after the treaties had been concluded, but before they were publicly known, although rumors of them had reached the members of the opposition, Lord North introduced in the House of Commons his proposals for concil-

iation with America, which were adopted; but upon their receipt in America they were rejected by Congress, which replied that it would now consider nothing short of the independence of the colonies. Undoubtedly these terms of conciliation would have been accepted gladly if they had been presented three, or perhaps even two, years earlier. But now it was too late.

One of the best of American historians has said: "The French alliance determined the complete separation of America from England."¹

The government of France now was the open ally of the colonies, and soon afterward war broke out between France and England. Paul Jones entered the harbor of Brest on the thirteenth of February, 1778, in the American man-of-war *Ranger*, carrying the flag of the United States, which was then, for the first time in its history, saluted by the guns of a foreign power. The ports of France were open to American ships of war, and from them went out the cruisers upon their work of harrying the British coasts and destroying and capturing British merchantmen. From a French port sailed, in August, 1779, the *Bonhomme Richard*, upon the "immortal cruise" which ended with the great night battle with the *Serapis*, of which one can never read without a thrill. The utmost consternation prevailed all along the British coasts; and the battle was the talk of Europe.

In July, 1778, a strong French fleet under Count d'Estaing, bringing the first French minister to this country and four thousand troops, arrived in Amer-

¹ William M. Sloane.

ica. Plans were made for a combined attack of the French and American forces upon Newport, where there was then a large British force. The fleet proceeded to Narragansett Bay and awaited the arrival of General Sullivan and his army; but there was long delay in the gathering of the militia and continental troops; and, before they were ready to unite with the French in the proposed attack, a British fleet, which had come to the assistance of the forces upon the island, appeared outside of Newport. The French fleet with the troops still on board went out to engage it, but a violent storm arose by which both fleets were much injured, and the French fleet was so disabled that the admiral proceeded to Boston to refit.

It is not necessary to tell this audience the story of the battle of Rhode Island, which Lafayette called "the best-fought action of the war," and that it resulted in the retreat of General Sullivan and the American forces. The French fleet and troops, after passing several months in Boston, sailed to the West Indies, which seemed to the French, and undoubtedly then were, the most important field of war as between them and the English.

In September, 1779, d'Estaing, with his fleet and several thousand troops, returned from the West Indies and united with the American forces under General Lincoln in the siege of Savannah. In a gallant assault upon the British works the allied forces were defeated, although both the French and American flags were for a moment planted upon the enemy's ramparts. D'Estaing in person led the French troops, and was wounded; and the French loss in killed and wounded was about seven hundred.

In the same year Spain made common cause with France against England. She never entered into any alliance with the thirteen colonies, and did not recognize their independence. Her unwillingness to do so and her lack of sympathy with them can well be understood in view of her interests as a great American colonial power; but from the beginning, by reason of her sentiments of hostility to England, she was determined to prevent, if possible, the return of the colonies to their previous allegiance. She undertook to play the part of a mediator between France and England; but insisted upon the independence of the colonies as a condition of any arrangement which should be made between those countries. This the British would not hear of; and Spain then determined upon war. She was anxious to recover Gibraltar, Minorca, Jamaica, and Florida; and the two navies joined would, it was believed, constitute a force far stronger than that of England, and be able to control the seas both in Europe and in America. England now had France and Spain as well as the thirteen colonies at war against her; and the theatre of war was extended far beyond the colonies, with the consequent inability of England to employ the greater part of her forces in the war upon this continent.

The scene of the conflict in America shifted to the Southern States, and there the general course of the war was unfavorable to the American arms. Georgia and South Carolina and part of North Carolina were lost. The British plan of campaign there was to harass and tire out the Americans, and to cut off the Southern States from the others. The year 1780 was indeed a year of disasters, and it seemed to many

of the patriot Americans that the end of the long struggle was near—an end involving defeat and failure. Congress was weak and vacillating, and had little authority. It had no power to levy taxes, nor to compel the separate States to levy the taxes which it recommended to them for the necessary maintenance of the army in the field; the system of short enlistments and a strange jealousy of the army interfered greatly with its numbers and efficiency; the troops were discontented, and in some instances there had been open mutiny. The state of the finances was as bad as bad could be, and Congress and the country were suffering from large issues of paper currency, which had greatly depreciated in value. There seems to be no doubt that, unfortunately, there was a somewhat general belief among the Americans that France and Spain sooner or later would make terms with England which would be advantageous to America, and, therefore, that to a great degree the future might be trusted to them rather than to self-reliance and earnest effort. Political wire-pulling, speculation, and selfish interests were rampant; and a large part of the people were apathetic. More important than all these, there was no central authority. The bond between the States was a very loose one; and, as a result, during the entire period of the war there was a lack of unity of action and of definite and sustained purpose, which became more and more felt as the war progressed, and which, in this most anxious and critical period, seems to have caused almost a paralysis of all governmental power and effort. A direct effect, however, of the impotence of Congress was the strengthening of the influence

and authority of Washington. Every patriotic heart turned to him. His wisdom, judgment, and courage met every difficulty; and the love of the army and its trust in him never failed. But these were, indeed, "the times which tried men's souls."

Should there be doubt in any one's mind as to the critical condition of the American cause, let us turn to the language of Washington. If we find him using words which describe the situation as serious, we may well believe that it was serious indeed.

In a letter written to President Reed of Pennsylvania in May, 1780, in reference particularly to the neglect of Congress to make proper provision for the army, he said: "I assure you every idea you can form of our distresses will fall short of the reality. There is such a combination of circumstances to exhaust the patience of the soldiery that it begins at length to be worn out, and we see in every line of the army the most serious features of mutiny and sedition. All our departments, all our operations are at a stand; and unless a system very different from that which has for a long time prevailed be immediately adopted throughout the States, our affairs must soon become desperate beyond the possibility of recovery. . . . Indeed, I have almost ceased to hope. The country in general is in such a state of insensibility and indifference to its interests that I dare not flatter myself with any change for the better. . . . This is a decisive moment; one of the most. I will go further and say *the* most important America has seen. The Court of France has made a glorious effort for our deliverance, and if we disappoint its intentions by our supineness we must be-

come contemptible in the eyes of all mankind; nor can we after that venture to confide that our allies will persist in an attempt to establish what it will appear we want inclination or ability to assist them in." In August, 1780, in a communication to Congress, he said: "To me it will appear miraculous if our affairs can maintain themselves much longer in their present train. If either the temper or the resources of the country will not admit of an alteration, we may expect soon to be reduced to the humiliating condition of seeing the cause of America upheld by foreign arms. The generosity of our allies has a claim to our confidence and our gratitude, but it is neither for the honor of America nor for the interest of the common cause to leave the work entirely to them." Later in the same year he wrote to Luzerne, the French minister in America: "I need use no arguments to convince your Excellency of the extremity to which our affairs are tending, and the necessity of support. You are an eye-witness to all our perplexities and all our wants. You know the dangerous consequences of leaving the enemy in quiet possession of their southern conquests, either in regard to negotiation this winter or a continuance of the war. You know our inability to expel them unassisted, or perhaps even to stop their career."

Upon the personal efforts of Washington in America and of Franklin in France everything seems at this period to have depended.

Franklin was then alone at Paris. Congress was always drawing bills on him, apparently without considering whether he had the means to meet them, and the ships with American cargoes were slow in

coming or never came. The French government, however, responded most generously. Mr. Parton, in his "Life of Franklin," says: "Never did he apply in vain. Never was he obliged to defer the payment of a draft for an hour." In fact, the very liberality and kindness of France undoubtedly made Congress the less active in endeavoring to raise money.

He had been instructed to ask for a further loan of twenty-five millions of francs for necessary supplies; and he laid the matter before Vergennes. In addition to the gifts of the king, already mentioned, and supplies and services furnished, France had made loans to the Americans of three millions of francs in 1778, of one million in 1779, and of four millions in 1780, which were of inestimable advantage. Besides the fact that the credit of Congress was so low that it was practically impossible for the American representatives to borrow money in Europe, they were also embarrassed by the presence of agents of some of the States, who were trying to secure separate loans; and at that time, as war upon the continent of Europe was expected, most of the governments were preparing for it, and their applications for loans were much more attractive to money-lenders than those of the Americans. How seriously Franklin regarded the situation can best be understood by his own words in a communication to Vergennes making the request for the loan, in February, 1781: "I am grown old. I feel myself much enfeebled by my late long illness, and it is probable I shall not long have any more concern in these affairs. I therefore take this occasion to express my opinion to

your Excellency that the present conjuncture is critical; that there is some danger lest the Congress should lose its influence over the people, if it is found unable to procure the aids that are wanted, and that the whole system of the new government in America may thereby be shaken; that, if the English are suffered once to recover that country, such an opportunity of effectual separation as the present may not occur again in the course of ages."

Early in 1781 Laurens, who was one of Washington's aides, was sent to France to describe the American necessities to the French government, and to ask for help. In a letter dated January fifteenth, and taken by Laurens to Franklin, Washington said: "To me nothing appears more evident than that the period of our opposition will very shortly arrive, if our allies cannot afford us that effectual aid, particularly in money and in a naval superiority, which are now solicited." And in another letter to Franklin he said: "We must have one of two things—peace, or money from France."

In April, 1781, Washington wrote to Laurens, then in Europe, as follows: "Day does not follow night more certainly than it brings with it some additional proof of the impracticability of carrying on the war without the aids you were directed to solicit. As an honest and candid man, whose all depends on the final and happy termination of the present contest, I assert this, while I give it decisively as my opinion that without a foreign loan, our present force, which is but the remnant of an army, cannot be kept together this campaign, much less will it be increased and in readiness for another.

The observations contained in my letter of the fifteenth of January last are verified every moment; and if France delays a timely and powerful aid in the critical posture of our affairs, it will avail us nothing should she attempt it hereafter. We are at this hour suspended in the balance, not from choice, but from hard and absolute necessity. . . . But why need I run into detail, when it may be declared in a word that we are at the end of our tether, and that now or never our deliverance must come."

Vergennes replied to Franklin that the great expenses which France was incurring in the war prevented her making the loan asked for, but that the king himself would give six millions of francs as a free gift, in addition to the three millions which he had given before. This was a great and most welcome help. In all the dealings between the French government and the American envoys, during the war, the conduct of the king and ministry at every point was marked by the utmost candor, frankness, courtesy, and kindness. And it may properly be mentioned here that, notwithstanding the reduced condition of the French treasury and the great demands upon it, a further loan of four millions of francs was made to the Americans in 1781, and in the same year they were enabled to procure a loan equivalent to ten millions of francs from Holland, upon the guaranty of its payment by the King of France. In 1782, France loaned them six millions more, and again in 1783 six millions. The sums received from the government of France, by the gifts of the king and by loans, and by means of the loan procured from Holland upon the king's

guaranty, aggregated about forty-four millions of francs. And the purchasing power of the franc was far greater then than it is now. Without the financial aid thus received, the struggle for independence could not have been continued. In addition, undoubtedly further assistance in money and supplies was given, the exact amount of which it is difficult to ascertain. Mr. Pickering, secretary of state, in a despatch to the American minister at Paris in 1797, stated that "all the loans and supplies received from France in the American war, amounting nearly to 53,000,000 livres" (or francs) had been paid in 1795; and we know that at that time the account with Beaumarchais had not yet been adjusted or settled.

Lafayette, who had returned to France in 1779, joined with Franklin in urging further aid, and, upon his return to America in April, 1780, brought the welcome news that French fleets with twelve thousand troops soon would depart for America. Lafayette was received with great favor upon this visit to France. Maurepas said of him: "It is fortunate for the King that Lafayette does not take it into his head to strip Versailles of its furniture, to send to his dear Americans, as his Majesty would be unable to refuse it."

On the tenth of July, 1780, a French fleet under Admiral de Ternay arrived at Newport, which had been evacuated by the British in 1779, bringing the first division of six thousand men, under command of Count de Rochambeau, and with the news that the second division soon would follow. The second division, however, when ready to sail, was blockaded

by the British at Brest, and never reached America. The officers and troops under Rochambeau had been most carefully chosen and were of the highest quality in every respect; and the instructions from the king to Rochambeau placed him under the orders of Washington.

The French forces, upon their arrival at Newport, went into camp there and in the neighborhood, and later into winter quarters at Newport and at Providence, excepting the cavalry and artillery, which were sent to Connecticut. The history of the visit of the French to Newport is a very interesting one, and doubtless is well known to many of you. They won the confidence and respect of every one in Rhode Island. Probably never in the history of an army was there a greater, if so great, an instance of excellent behavior in every respect. The French troops showed every possible consideration to the people among whom they were quartered, and made themselves liked and welcome wherever they went. They paid promptly for what they needed; and we may be sure that the farmers and tradesmen of Rhode Island were glad to see the good, hard money with which they paid, in those days of the depreciated State and Continental paper. It is said that no property, even of the most trivial kind, was ever taken by the French soldiers in Rhode Island. Lafayette, who was an officer of the American army and commanded American troops, wrote from Newport to General Washington, in July, 1780: "You would have been amused the other day to see two hundred and fifty of our recruits who came to Conanicut without provisions and without tents, and

who mingled so well with the French troops that every Frenchman, officer or soldier, took an American with him and shared with him, in a most friendly way, his bed and supper. . . . The French discipline is such that chickens and pigs walk among the tents without any one disturbing them, and there is a field of corn in the camp, not an ear of which has been touched." One writer says: "The army of Rochambeau in its march from Newport to Yorktown was so thoroughly well conducted that there was not even a single instance of one of the soldiers taking an apple or a peach from an orchard without leave having been previously obtained"; and, when they were on the same march, a Hartford newspaper stated in reference to them: "A finer body of men was never in arms, and no army was ever better furnished with everything necessary for a campaign. The exact discipline of the troops and the attention of the officers to prevent any injury to individuals have made the march of this army through the country very agreeable to the inhabitants; and it is with great pleasure we assure our readers not a single disagreeable circumstance had taken place."

It is pleasant to read of the good opinion which the French won from every one who was brought in contact with them during their stay in America; and perhaps no incident is more picturesque than that of the visit of a deputation of Quakers to Rochambeau in Philadelphia, when he was passing through that city on the way to Yorktown. We can picture to our minds the plainly dressed Quakers, with their broad-brimmed hats, in the presence of the distinguished French commander and his brilliant officers.

The eldest one addressed him thus: "General, it is not for thy military qualities that we come to make thee this visit. We make no account of talents for war; but thou art the friend of man, and thy army lives in perfect order and discipline. It is this that leads us to pay thee our respects."

The French officers were noble and very gallant gentlemen. They knew no fear, and they were courteous, kind, and considerate; and some of them have left us memoirs of their service in America which are interesting reading. Many of you who are of Newport probably have read them, and will recall the descriptions of the people and of the manners and customs of Newport and Providence in 1780 and 1781, and of the hospitalities received and returned. And perhaps you remember the pleasant things which they tell of your townswomen of that day, the pretty Misses Hunter, Margaret Champlin, Polly Lawton, and others. The Count de Ségur wrote: "Certain it is that, if I had not been married and happy, I should, whilst coming to defend the liberty of the Americans, have lost my own at the feet of Polly Lawton."

When Washington came here in 1781 he passed between double lines of the French soldiers, in their white uniforms, saluting him on his way from the Long Wharf, where he landed, to this State House, where we now are; and later he reviewed the French troops, whose line extended from Pelham street to the two-mile corner. Those were happy days to the good people of Newport, and they were especially bright after the gloom and sadness of the long years of the British occupation which preceded them.

Early in 1781 two expeditions of portions of the French fleet were undertaken from Newport against the British in Virginia, but no results of importance came from them; and the fleet, after each of these expeditions, returned to Newport.

We are now approaching the end. It is not necessary here to go into the particulars of the campaign which resulted in the defeat and surrender of Lord Cornwallis. The French troops from Rhode Island and Connecticut joined Washington on the Hudson, and by strategy of the highest order on his part, which won the admiration of the greatest soldiers of Europe, the combined forces were brought together at Yorktown. There the sea was commanded by the fleet of the Count de Grasse, who also had landed three thousand French troops; and the great opportunity had at last arrived. There, in the culminating action of the campaign, the French and American allies, one bearing the white flag with the golden lilies of France and the other the new flag of the thirteen States, soon to be independent in fact as well as in name, fought side by side and together won the great victory which practically closed the war. Without the aid of the French troops and the coöperation of the French fleet the plan of this campaign would have been impossible and this great victory could not have been won. When the news of it reached Lord North he exclaimed: "It is all over."

What would have been the fate of the independence declared at Philadelphia on the Fourth of July, 1776, if France had not participated in the war, may be a subject for speculation; but that that indepen-

dence was achieved with the aid of France, and could not have been won without it when it was won, there can be no doubt. There is every reason to believe that, had it not been for the aid of France, the Americans would have been forced to abandon the struggle. It must be remembered further that the value and importance of the aid rendered by France is to be measured not only by its direct but also by its indirect effects. An immediate and constant result of the existence of war with France was that England found that the greater part of her military and naval power must be reserved to meet that brave and determined enemy. In a short time Spain joined France; and England then found herself engaged not only with the colonists in America, but with these other enemies in America, and also in the West Indies, in Florida; in the British Channel, in the Mediterranean, on the coast of Africa, and in India. Her forces therefore were divided, and she was called upon to defend possessions of the greatest value, and even to prepare to defend England itself. As time passed, she declared war against Holland, chiefly because the Dutch had allowed American privateers to take refuge in their harbors, and because documents captured at sea showed that the sentiments of Holland were friendly to the colonists, and that negotiations were in progress for a treaty of commerce. As a result of her constant stopping of neutral ships, the maritime powers of continental Europe, under the lead of the Empress Catharine, adopted the principle that neutral ships have the right to carry their cargoes into the ports of a country engaged in war, except when such cargoes

consist of munitions of war, and that paper blockades should be disregarded. In the association of Russia, Denmark, and Sweden in the league of the "Armed Neutrality," which was directed particularly against England, and to which Holland, Prussia, the German Empire, and Portugal soon afterward became parties, England found most of the powers of Europe with whom she was not already engaged in hostilities very ill-disposed toward her. The expenses of this widely extended struggle tried heavily even her resources, and the wars in which she was engaged became a strain and a burden upon her. Necessarily her attention was to a great degree diverted from America, and her capacity actively to prosecute the war there was correspondingly reduced. The battle for American independence was indirectly being fought on many seas and in many lands, where the English met their European enemies. To the Americans of that day, impatient and discouraged, and from time to time disappointed at not receiving from France the military and naval aid upon their own continent and upon their own coasts which they desired, these important facts were not so clear as they now are to us. But their importance to the cause of American independence cannot be overestimated; and they all resulted from the alliance against England made by the French king with the American States.

Even in monarchical countries outside of France—where there was no such sympathy with the American cause as existed in that country—the progress of events caused sympathy to be alienated from England and to turn toward the colonists. And the long

war, with its expenses and burdens and resultant discontent, not only weakened the determination of the British government to overcome the Americans, but gave strength to the party in opposition, which was in favor of a discontinuance of the war.

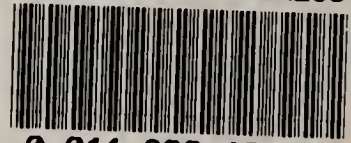
The furnishing of supplies and money—the sinews of war—has already been mentioned. Let it suffice to add that such supplies and money were absolutely essential to the prosecution of the war; that without them it could not have been continued; and that by the aid of the French government they were procured in France, and to a considerable extent were generously given as free gifts.

A great people are greatest in their attitude of mind; and the people of these United States, prosperous, strong, and happy in the independence which, under the blessing of God, they have so long enjoyed, should gladly and ungrudgingly recognize all the influences which contributed to the achievement of that independence. No one of us, or of those who come after us, ever should fail to hold in remembrance and in high appreciation the benefits which came to our forefathers, and through them have come to us, from the French Alliance and from the aid given by France in the establishment of our national existence. We know that the controlling motives which led to the giving of that aid were enmity to England, and the belief that the power of that country would be humbled and France benefited. Our forefathers understood those motives and appealed directly to them. The participation of France in our struggle was based by the government of that country upon grounds of national policy, having in view

primarily and properly the interests of France. Our forefathers realized that upon the aid of France depended their success in the war for independence. They asked—even importuned—France to help them; and she responded generously and effectively. Can the people of these United States ever be less earnest than was the noble Washington to recognize, as he did, that “the generous proofs which His Most Christian Majesty has given of his attachment to the cause of America . . . must . . . inspire every citizen of the States with sentiments of the most unalterable gratitude”?

Let us recall what the aid which he gave to the “cause of America” cost the king who gave it. Among the final causes which wrought his doom were the burden of the expenses of the war with England, coming upon an already impoverished treasury, and the influence upon France of the success of the American Revolution. We should never forget that to that unhappy king, Louis XVI, we owe the aid which was given us by France in the achievement of our independence.

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